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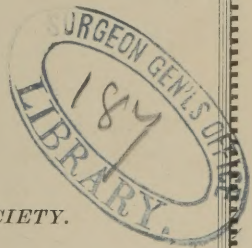
By HENRY GIBBONS, M. D.

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# MODERN SPIRITISM:

ANNUAL ADDRESS BEFORE THE SAN FRANCISCO  
MEDICAL SOCIETY.

BY HENRY GIBBONS, M. D.

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At the commencement of the eighth year of our existence as a society, we are entitled to felicitate ourselves on the complete success of our organization. With nearly one hundred members—a larger number than ever before belonged to a local medical society in California, and a larger number than the aggregate of all the other societies in the State—with one thousand dollars in the treasury as the nucleus of a building fund, and an annual income of more than five hundred dollars clear of expenses—with meetings entirely undisturbed by personal difficulties, but forming a school of medical science for the reading of papers, the discussion of topics, and the exhibition of a constant supply of rich pathological specimens—our society has become to its members a benefactor whose power and influence, increasing as the years roll on, are essential to their advancement and success in the profession.

Within a few years past there has been much enquiry into the effects of various occupations on health. With great attention and industry, many causes of suffering and disease





not appreciated or suspected in former times, have been brought to light. Drains and sewers, dwellings and school rooms, sewing machines and wall papers, have been scrutinized with microscopic acumen to detect hidden seeds of evil. And the whole world has appreciated and applauded the effort thus made to guard the human family from influences of a thousand kinds, supposed to affect injuriously the physical structure and the intellectual development of men, women and children.

I propose to make a few observations on the present occasion, in reference to a pursuit which is operating extensively on the bodies and minds of individuals in America and in Europe, and which can not be ignored in the contemplation of hygienic influences. I allude to what is called "Spiritualism," and which I prefer to call *Spiritism*, and I shall enquire whether the practices connected with this subject are not inimical to the bodily and mental organization.

In the first place, look at what is called a "seance." A number of individuals sit around a table, with their hands resting on it. They expect or desire to witness some extraordinary phenomenon, having relation to departed friends. Their minds are solemnized by the nature of the occasion, and indeed the direction of their thoughts towards another world is considered essential in some degree to the success of the experiment. In this state of anticipation and suspense they sit for an hour—sometimes for two hours or even longer. It is evening—it is night—it is midnight. It is the hour when nature calls for sleep. There they sit, transfixed almost as statues, in solemn silence, in breathless expectation, in anxious anticipation, the reason in abeyance and the imagination wrought up to the highest pitch of excitement. Will any sane man or woman assert that all this is compatible with the normal and healthful action of the brain and nervous system?

Suppose the expectations are realized. The rappings commence, or the table begins to move; it dances over the floor, or it rises in mid-air. Its sounds and movements are intelli-

gent, and they are interpreted into messages from departed spirits. Other phenomena in great variety and still more unusual and astonishing, transpire. What effect has all this on the brain and nerves of the performers and witnesses?

And then comes the repetition of it. No one who has witnessed all this, and who has faith in it, will fail to follow it up. Night after night, the body and mind are subjected to the same excitement and strain. The subject is ever present in thought, and is the theme of constant conversation. Before the brain has recovered from the impression made by one seance, there comes another. Nervous and susceptible persons must soon feel and show the noxious influence. Those of cold and phlegmatic disposition may not exhibit the consequences, but this does not prove that no hidden evil results.

I do not assert that all the disciples of Spiritism are subjected to the ordeal as described. But that processes equivalent to them are generally practised will not be denied. Nor is it essential to my purpose to deny the truth of the alleged phenomena. It is better for my argument to admit the validity of the statements made by Spiritists. If all they claim be true, their practices are the more deleterious to health.

Mesmerism and clairvoyance are analagous in practice to Spiritism. Individuals have had their health seriously impaired by being frequently subjected to the mesmeric sleep. The case of a young lady is before me, who was very sensitive in this respect, and who was the subject of repeated experiments in a circle of friends. The effect on her health was so manifestly injurious as to be apparent to every one; and though she desisted entirely from the practice, she died in a few months from pulmonary consumption, the development of which was undoubtedly hastened by the somnambulic exercises.

Another case presents to my mind—that of a young lady who had been repeatedly thrown into the somnambulic condition, and who at length would sometimes pass into that condition involuntarily and without outside agency. I have seen this lady fall into the sleep merely from looking



at two individuals, one of whom was trying to mesmerize the other. She told me that she had once been overcome in the same way whilst walking in the street in Schenectady, in spite of her utmost resistance, and that she discovered afterwards that the fit had been produced by a gentleman in Troy, fifteen miles distant, who at that moment had *willed* that she should fall asleep. This lady was perfectly honest in her belief. She possessed an art which is highly developed among Spiritists—the art of believing. Will any one pretend that the brains of such individuals are in a normal condition?

Writers on hygiene declaim in severe language against the overtasking of children at school, and the excessive labor of literary and professional men. By common consent the brains of children are acknowledged to suffer from the practice, and we are warned almost daily of the ill effects of overwork on the brain by the sudden deaths of eminent men in the meridian of life. And what is the stress on the brain in either of these cases, compared with that to which it is subjected by the exercises of Spiritism as described?

It should also be noted that persons who engage in the practices referred to, as a class, make great account of the dictates of reason and the laws of nature. They would be regarded as philosophers, and to some extent, reformers. Their condemnation must be in proportion to their profession.

The argument against Spiritism may be fortified by referring to the extreme credulousness which it engenders and which indicates anything but a healthy tone of mind. When Mesmer aimed to make proselytes, he was careful to direct his neophytes to avoid reflecting on the wonderful and incredible nature of the results. He taught them to lay aside their reason and confine themselves to experimentation. Cutting loose from the anchorage of reason, and drifting away at the mercy of imagination and of undisciplined sensations and perceptions, little by little the mind forgets its reckoning and is finally lost in the mists of credulity. There is nothing too absurd for belief under these circumstances.

Rushing from one extreme to the other, in accordance with the well-known law, those who once believed the least now believe the most. Take, for instance, the case of Robert Dale Owen, who devoted the early part of his life to a zealous warfare against what he deemed the incredible and the absurd, and who is now spending his last days in a still more zealous warfare *for* the very same beliefs, with accompaniments a hundred-fold more absurd than the "superstitions" against which he formerly contended.

Not very different was the experience of the late Professor Hare, of the University of Pennsylvania. Accustomed through a long life to developing and dealing with the practical and demonstrable results of chemistry, and believing only what was palpably revealed to the senses, he engaged in his advancing years in a studied investigation of the claims of Spiritism, with the design of refuting them. Becoming absorbed in the pursuit, he soon began to observe extraordinary phenomena; and little by little was drawn into the vortex of unlimited credulity, until his reason was stolen away and his intellect wrecked. A similar case occurred in this city some years ago, in which a man of intelligence and mental activity and saturated with German unbelief, launched into the exercises of Spiritism, swallowed all its monstrosities and ended his career in an insane asylum.

If a certain gymnastic sport or form of exercise were found to do injury to the bodies, even of a small proportion of those indulging in it, sentence of condemnation would be passed upon it without delay. That the majority of persons are benefited by it, would not prevent its prohibition. Why should not the same rule be applied to the mental exercises in question?

But, it is argued, there should be no limit set to the boundaries of science; the truth should be investigated at all hazards. To this it may be answered that science courts the light and avails itself of all means of enquiry. Spiritism, however, loves darkness rather than light and covers its asserted phenomena with a veil of privacy. So far from en-



larging the boundaries of true science, it is in direct conflict with the established laws of matter, and promotive of credulity and superstition. All its modern revelations amount to little more than a rehash of the ancient annals of witchcraft. No new truth in geography, astronomy or physical science has it brought to light. Even should it claim to do so, how are we to determine the credibility of the claim, when, by universal acknowledgment, honest spirits and lying spirits testify indiscriminately, so that the only proof of the truth of any of the revelations, is a knowledge of the fact possessed by a living witness. That is to say, all the information furnished from the invisible world, which is not already known, is as likely to be false as true. Is not the application of the term *science* to such pursuits a gross prostitution?

The pursuit of real knowledge in certain directions may cost more than the knowledge is worth when acquired. The polar explorations are of this character. All the scientific truths hitherto collected by the Arctic expeditions are but a poor equivalent for the suffering and loss of life involved. Even should our present knowledge be extended by circum-polar discoveries and the demonstration of a North-West passage, it is questionable whether that consummation will ever be worth as much to the world as the life of Sir John Franklin. And yet the plea for persistent effort and sacrifice in that direction has vastly more force than the argument in behalf of the pursuit of Spiritism for scientific purposes. Those dismal and dreary regions have been made to yield many facts in physical science. Besides, they are not peopled with the lying spirits which infest what might be called the Arctic regions of psychology.

Perhaps it will be urged that the pursuits in question have eliminated some useful results. They have enlarged the sphere of our knowledge in regard to the capacities and susceptibilities of the human mind. They have taught us an important lesson on the deceivableness of the senses and the



fallibility of their testimony. They have shown us to what an extent the tension of mind and the strain of imagination may disorder the brain and undermine the reason. Having at great cost learned this much, it might be well to stop and abandon the field, at least until we extend the accommodations for the insane.

The tendency of these pursuits to disorder the intellect is not to be tested by the records of insane asylums, or measured by the actual number of cases of insanity known or reputed to have so originated. There is no distinct line to separate sanity from insanity. Between the two is a wide range of neutral territory, occupied by individuals who exhibit peculiar traits of character, which to-day pass for eccentricities, but in the future may prove to have been the incipient developments of mental disease. All persons are not capable of insanity. It is probable that the larger proportion of mankind are so organized that none of the exciting causes of the malady could produce it in them. And there are many who live with reason undisturbed, only because those exciting causes were fortunately absent or wanting in force.

I will not say that all such would find in the belief and the pursuits of Spiritism a cause sufficient to lead their minds out of the domain of right reason ; but I will venture the statement that no other one cause is capable of doing so much mischief in that direction. I never meet with an ardent believer in Spiritism, and listen to his eloquent story, and read in his countenance the disgust excited by my incredulity when I decline to believe some wonderful account that he has read in the newspapers, without a suspicion that the ichneumon's egg is hatching in his brain.

Extreme credulity is not only a shadow of the coming trouble, but a cause. When one suddenly comes to believe what he has previously, during a course of years, disbelieved or treated with ridicule, the change is revolutionary and transfers the mind into a new climate. Thus may credulity become the starting point in the lapse from sanity to insanity. It requires but a trifling matter to switch off the mind from

the right line ; and the divergence, scarcely perceptible at first, soon carries it out of sight of the original track. Spiritism is a busy mischief-maker, always watching an opportunity to misplace the switches on the rail-road of life.

The course of argument which Spiritists adopt—and they are excessively fond of argument—is always the same. They begin with a statement of asserted facts—extraordinary phenomena which can only be explained on their own theory. They have witnessed these phenomena, or some distinguished individual, doctor or professor, in America or Europe, has witnessed them ; and if you doubt such excellent authority, you are a bigot or a fool. You are required, not only to believe the statement, but to explain it away, or otherwise accept the theory.

We have lately had a very striking and a very useful lesson on this subject, in the Katie King exhibitions. These were perhaps the most extraordinary phenomena ever yet asserted, involving not only the materialization of departed spirits, but the actual creation of matter. Patches were torn out of garments and their places supplied with new cloth by the touch merely of the spirit hand. This and other statements equally marvelous, were declared on the authority of a number of eminent scientists. It was impossible that they could be mistaken. They were known to the world as men of truth, and to doubt their testimony was to stultify one's self.

And yet they *were* mistaken. They now announce that they were the victims of imposition. These scientific observers—sharp-sighted men, who subjected the extraordinary demonstrations to all sorts of tests, and who could not, by any possibility be deceived ; whose disciples took offense at any one who dared to doubt their infallibility ;—they were the dupes of a girl's legerdermain. Others have been duped in like manner. Not only have departed spirits shown a strong inclination to tell lies, but living spirits have been repeatedly detected in the same unseemly practice.

To claim for the pursuits and practices of Spiritists the character of a science, is not only unreasonable but absurd.

Science has fixed laws. It is common property. It is demonstrable to all. Electricity, galvanism, magnetism, subtle and mysterious as are their movements, can be made palpable in their phenomena to all the world. When the electrician in Europe makes a discovery and announces it, we can verify and repeat it here. And so of all chemical, physiological and scientific processes and discoveries. Concealment, darkness and mystery do not appertain to science. Science works by day rather than at midnight. She courts the light of the sun, not the darkness of the secret chamber. She has no favorites for whom exclusively to perform her wondrous processes. She gives herself alike to all mankind. She sets her light on a hill, and hides it not under a bushel or in a "cabinet."

But there has always been evinced by the human mind a tendency to prostitute science to speculative purposes, and to give it to the control of the imagination. Study and labor exact investigation and experimentation, are less attractive to the common mind than the ideal and speculative. Thus astronomy was formerly lost in astrology, when men left the study of the material world to ramble in the world of imagination. So chemistry was merged into alchemy, and philosophers so called spent their lives in the search for the Philosopher's Stone and the Elixir of Life.

Spiritism bears the same relation to Physiology and Psychology. It is Physiology sleep walking, or run mad.

An objection to Spiritism is the trickery incident to it, as cause or effect, or both. Its whole history is full of fraud and imposture. Again and again have its wonderful manifestations flashed forth and dazzled the world for a season, and procured the endorsement of great names. And then the hand of a juggler appears, and the curtain falls for a time.

There is also something repulsive in the venality which it seems to engender. Its theme is lofty beyond utterance. It deals with immortality and eternal life. Its interests are those of the undying soul. It cherishes companionship with



the departed spirits of the beloved of our hearts. Of all human pursuits, it is the most solemn and sublime in its professions and associations. And yet, whilst every other moral and religious concern has its missionaries who labor without hire, the apostles of Spiritism exhibit a venality about in proportion to the richness of their divine endowment. What a farce do they present in their public announcements ! A medium of extraordinary power will give a seance at which will appear the spirits of the martyred Lincoln, the immortal Washington, Socrates the philosopher, and other benefactors of mankind.—Admission ten cents !

It is very convenient for one who has gulped down volumes of fiction and legerdemain scarcely sugar-coated with truth, to fling in the face of those more slow of belief the imputation of prejudice and bigotry. The discoveries of Harvey and of Jenner were ignored by professional men ; Lardner asserted that it was impossible to navigate the Atlantic by steam ; Galileo was punished because he promulgated the great facts of astronomy, and so forth. Therefore the wildest speculations and projects are worthy of serious consideration, and he who refuses to accept them is a fool.

Now I have not come to my opinions in regard to Spiritism and kindred subjects without some inquiry. From my boyhood I had a fancy for the curious in science and art, and a disposition to investigate such matters as ventriloquism, fortune-telling, legerdemain and clairvoyance. My first important experience with the latter was at a series of exhibitions given by a traveling company of mesmerisers, who requested the audience to select a committee to inspect their operations and to prevent or detect any collusion. I was appointed on that committee, with my own hearty approval ; for it was just the opportunity I sought. The experiments were openly conducted on the platform of the lecture room. There was no cabinet, no curtains, no darkness. The eyes of the committee-men were everywhere, and the result showed the disadvantage of such an arrangement. When the clairvoyant was called on to communicate to the

audience through the senses of the performer and tell what the latter was looking at, failure rather than success was the rule. The master of ceremonies confessed the failure and attributed it to the heated and humid atmosphere of the crowded lecture-room. Another exhibition was appointed for the next evening.

I had observed that when the speaker called for an object to be exhibited, it was of necessity a hat, cap, cane, watch, or some other particular object such as people always carry about them. This led me to bring in my pockets to the second trial a variety of things not commonly found in a lecture-room—for instance a hat-brush, a sand-box, a razor-strap, and so forth. At the proper time these objects were produced by persons to whom I had distributed them, with the effect of balking the performance and making the second exhibition a more decided failure even than the first. There was one exception however, and that was in the case of the sand-box. This the mesmerizer took in his hand and shook it sharply over the head of "Frederic," whilst questioning him repeatedly as to what it was, and finally turned it so that the sand should run out and fall on Frederic's neck. At this moment I said in a whisper—"you are spilling my sand!"—when Frederic instantly responded—"a sand-box!" The audience applauded vehemently, and then called for the committee to report on the experiment, whereupon I mentioned the whisper, reminding them however that, according to the law propounded by mesmerists, it was impossible for Frederic, whilst in the mesmeric or clairvoyant state, to hear any voice except that of the individual who had mesmerized him.

At the close of the second entertainment the performer again acknowledged the failure, and on this occasion attributed it to a magnet which some mischievous person must have brought into the room; for such would be the effect, he said. But he would give a third exhibition and have a new committee from which doctors should be excluded; for doctors were always too conceited and too bigoted to inves-

tigate fairly. By this time the audience had got enough of clairvoyance for the present, and those only who sympathized with the performer attended the third meeting. A committee of the right kind was now selected, and a young girl named Harriet, some relation of the mesmerist, was the subject. Harriet having been properly manipulated and somnambulized, succeeded tolerably well. Foreseeing this result, I had procured a horse-shoe magnet and placed it in the hands of a friend, a stranger to the mesmerist, that he might test its effect. This was Dr. James S. Naudain, son of Dr. Arnold Naudain, then U. S. Senator from Delaware. He sat by the side of Harriet and actually held it in contact with her arm whilst she was performing with the greatest success. At the conclusion the mesmerizer addressed the audience and declared that he would have succeeded on the former occasions but for the supposed presence of a magnet, and the unfair scrutiny of the committee. As I had been chairman of the committee so accused, I took the liberty of giving to the audience the story of the real magnet. I announced also that I would, at a time appointed, give an exhibition of seeming clairvoyance which should far excel the performance of the mesmerist.

A few days afterwards my exhibition was duly announced. I enlisted in my service a younger brother, now Rodmond Gibbons, of Oakland, who was then a lad of 13 years, and the only training which he had, occupied less than two hours, in the afternoon previous to the performance. He had never witnessed a mesmeric experiment, and was totally unacquainted with the subject. An audience of several hundred persons filled the lecture-room. It was composed largely of persons of the best order of intelligence. A committee of four gentlemen was appointed by them to overlook the proceedings and prevent collusion. I stated that my performance would be altogether trickery, and requested the audience and the committee to use the utmost scrutiny and detect the tricks if they could. My brother was seated on the platform, his eyes securely bandaged by the committee, and I stood



behind him and requested persons in the room to hold up any objects to my view. I then asked the "medium" a few questions, and he gave the names of the objects in every instance. This showed that he saw with my eyes. To prove that he possessed also my sense of feeling, I desired the gentlemen of the committee to touch or strike me. I had only to ask one or two questions to get correct answers as to the part of the body impressed. This proved that he felt with my faculties of sensation. So of taste, he answered promptly what was the taste of anything put in my mouth. To prove that he was under the influence of my will, any one in the room was invited to write on a slip of paper a request that I should will him to perform some particular movement, such as raising the right hand or the left hand, or moving the right or left foot, or rising on his feet. I had nothing to do but to look intently, as I stood behind him, on the part to be moved, and it was done.

These experiments were continued for nearly two hours, without a single failure. At the conclusion I requested the gentlemen of the committee, or any persons in the audience, to explain if they could the *modus operandi*. But though a number of individuals attempted it, not one even approached a solution of a single trick. And yet when I came to explain to them, as I did, the method employed, it was so simple and at the same time so infallible as almost to appear ludicrous. It was like the old story of standing the egg on end.

And what was the moral? Not that mesmerism and clairvoyance are all a trick, but simply that intelligent and sagacious people can easily be imposed on, and that the testimony of our senses is not to be hastily accepted in regard to phenomena which contradict our universal experience of the laws of nature. If the brief training of a single lesson could enable two unpracticed performers thus to perplex and mystify an entire audience, what might not be accomplished by my brother and myself if we should devote our whole lives and energies to the pursuit?

From this time onward I sought opportunities of witnessing the phenomena of clairvoyance, but my presence was almost always singularly preventive of them. I could read and hear of marvelous results, in all directions, but I did not hold myself bound to explain or even to believe without seeing with my own eyes. At an exhibition given in Philadelphia by some itinerant performers of great celebrity, when I stood on the stage as one of a committee appointed by the audience, a young girl in a clairvoyant condition told the denomination of a bank note which I held in my closed hand, and even read the name of the bank. At this I was staggered ; but learning soon afterwards that the girl was loose in her morals, I suspected trickery, though I could not explain the trick.

After a somewhat brilliant career of ten or fifteen years, clairvoyance grew stale and unpopular. The practical mind of the people demanded a positive sign of its truth. A revelation of distant occurrences, such as a shipwreck, or the death of a friend, was within the range of its claims. Let it demonstrate itself by some revelation of the kind. In all attempts of this character it failed signally. The occupation of its votaries being gone, they turned their attention in another channel and began to talk of psychology and biology. Many really wonderful phenomena were exhibited under these names, all illustrating the extraordinary operation of mind on mind and mind on body, and all coming under the cognizance of scientific law. I had frequent opportunities of observing these phenomena. They did not shun my presence like the more recondite and dubious wonders of clairvoyance. Public performers in this line became "Professors" and perambulated the country turning their art into gold. And when that style of exhibition was, in turn, growing stale and unattractive, some of them invaded the domain of physic, and went about curing diseases by the "laying on of hands." Many cures were effected by them, which appeared wonderful to a populace ignorant of the history of psychical epidemics. Their cures however did not begin to approach

in number or importance those of the "Metallic Tractors" of Perkins, at the close of the last and beginning of the present century. Besides, the most notable of them lasted no longer than the "sympathetic snout" of Talicotius.

Up to this time, the spirits of the departed had not come to the aid of explorers in the "Debatable Land." It was claimed only that the mind of a living person might, under certain circumstances, vacate the body and journey abroad in the exercise of the perceptive faculties, and return with much knowledge so acquired—knowledge limited mainly however to the material world. But a new dispensation was at hand. The law of epidemic perturbation, it seems, is not only active on earth, but also in the dwelling place of the spirits of the dead. Disturbed in their repose, the souls of the departed left their sphere, and uninvited at first, engaged in a series of noisy manifestations, which, if done by mortals, would have been regarded as riotous and unlawful. Prowling around in the dead of night and disturbing the peace of families and tumbling and smashing the furniture, one might consider rather vulgar employment for spirits that had been for years enjoying the refinement and glory of Heaven. But so it was. The souls of sages and philosophers, of saints and martyrs came down from the eternal throne, to play the role of mischievous school-boys.

In the year 1852, a posse of these spirits made a descent upon California, and entertained, or were entertained by a company of young gentlemen who were wont to assemble for the purpose at a house on Stone street. After verifying their mission by turning the furniture topsy-turvy, they became the bearers of news from the Atlantic States. It was at the time of the Presidential election, and there was no telegraph in those days. The spirits brought news in advance of the mail that Gen. Scott was elected, and some of the believers made heavy bets with ignorant outsiders that such was the case. The loss of their bets convinced them that they had been duped by lying spirits, and I believe induced them to drop their acquaintance.



Following up my enquiries, I sought opportunities to witness this new phase of the marvelous. But I was still doomed to disappointment. My presence was always offensive to the ghostly visitors and they fled from it. On one occasion when I entered a room on Jackson street during a seance, the spirit of William Penn announced itself by the customary raps. I was delighted, as I had a personal interest in ascertaining the place assigned to Quakers in the spirit world. But the invisible presence had but a few words to say, and that in language such as no Quaker ever employed, and then hurried away to make another call.

At another time I attended a seance on a Sunday evening, at a house also in Jackson street, to which I was invited with the assurance that I should witness something pronounced and marvelous. About thirty persons were seated in a circle around the room, whilst three or four others were at a table in the centre. One of the latter requested the spirits to indicate their presence by rapping or tipping the table. No answer being given, he renewed his request several times with sweet persuasion, but in vain. The circle of spectators joined hands, but still there was no response. I should have mentioned that Lola Montez, who was quite an enthusiastic believer, was in the circle. At length it was suggested that the spirits might prefer to indicate their presence by means of light; and if so they were requested to give three raps. The raps came, and the lights were extinguished, and we sat in utter darkness, looking for illumination. At this instant I saw, or believed I saw, a distinct flash of light at one end of the room, but lest I might be mistaken I said nothing. Another person however spoke up and confirmed my observation, but as a doubt was expressed by others, I thought it right to declare that I too had seen it. I was delighted now to get hold of something real, and I hoped for other developments. But the cup was dashed from my lips by Lola Montez, who exclaimed; "I can explain all that; I made the light lighting my cigarito!"

Such are a few illustrations of my experience in search of

knowledge in this field. I have been pursuing a phantom for nearly half a century—a phantom it has proved to *me*, call it science, art, mystery, or what you please.

But, I am told, it is presumptuous in me to set at naught the testimony of thousands of people, including men of note as scientists and philosophers, who have witnessed the phenomena. To this let me answer that the honesty and veracity of a witness are one thing, and his infallibility another. How often do we find conscientious and truthful men swearing in a court of justice to opposite conditions of fact, observed by them in broad daylight! Who has not witnessed feats of legerdemain which he could not by any possibility account for! A man will take my watch and put it in a mortar and pound it to pieces before my eyes, then throw the fragments in a hat and give the hat a shake and return the watch to me sound and perfect. Must I admit that he did really crush and reconstruct the timepiece, because I can not detect any artifice? R. D. Owen, determined not to be deceived, subjects to close scrutiny the doors and windows of the apartment, and the cabinet from which the apparition is to come, and then he beholds the form and the substance and converses with it and feels it. His eyes and ears and hands all unite in testifying to the fact. He not only believes everything, but contemns the understanding of persons who decline to accept his statement with his explanation, and who suggest a possibility of deception. In this he acts the part of spiritists everywhere; for it is their universal custom to require those with whom they converse to see with *their* eyes, to believe with *their* faith, and to accept *their* explanations.

But at the critical moment when Mr. Owen and his scientific friends succeed in bridging over the chasm between the two worlds, the glorious vision is dispelled by some mar-plot who discovers the spirit of Katie King clothed in an every-day garment of flesh and blood! What assurance have we that the Katie King of Wallace and Crookes was not a real personage, like the American Katie with whom Owen had such a pleasant flirtation?

Suppose a navigator arriving at San Francisco should report that he had discovered an island in the Pacific, in which the sun rises in the west and sets in the east. He would pass for a fool or a madman. But what if his whole crew and a company of intelligent passengers besides, should confirm his statement? Still no one would believe it, though the singularity of the asserted phenomenon thus substantiated, might induce the sending of a deputation of *savants* to solve the mystery. Suppose they should return and testify to the same fact. Would you believe it?

And why not? Simply because your observation and your knowledge of the laws of nature teach you that it is impossible. No weight of human testimony would suffice to convince you of its truth. You might come to the conclusion that there was some extraordinary condition of things on that island capable of perverting the senses in a mysterious manner, but you could not be convinced that the sun does really rise in the west at that place, and set in the east. To remind you that the sun once stood still at human command, and that miracles of equal wonder were wrought in olden times, would scarcely shake your unbelief.

The *reductio ad absurdum* is a legitimate method of disproving a false proposition in mathematics. It may not be easy or practicable to disprove it by direct means, but if the consequences are impossible, it cannot be true. A school-boy will demonstrate the proposition that a hound in pursuit of a hare, and running exactly twice as fast as the hare, can never overtake it. For the hare, in the first minute, making half the distance of the hound, will continue at the end of any given minute to be just half as far in advance as at the former minute; and as the continued division of the distance by two cannot destroy it, so there must forever be some space between the pursuer and the pursued.

Problems like this are often encountered when common sense is the only corrective of demonstrated absurdities in human experience. More frequently the judgment is called on to correct the evidence of the senses. But both sense and



judgment are disordered by prolonged attention and strain in one direction. In the division of labor required by the immense extension of the field of scientific research in modern times, specialists become a necessity. And it is the universal and almost inevitable tendency of special studies to magnify if not to distort the objects of study. In every human pursuit, intellectual or material, the judgment and the conscience are warped by the predominant thought. Robert Dale Owen says that whilst investigating the subject, he had fifty seances in three months, besides reading a multitude of books on the marvelous and supernatural. Such an ordeal could scarcely fail to disorder the perceptions and vitiate the judgment. After that, he was well prepared to resolve the problem of creating something out of nothing.

It is a matter of frequent boast that the spiritists have seven millions of adherents in the United States. They sometimes claim ten millions. When we reflect that there are less than twice ten millions of adult population in the republic, the claim appears to be a bold one; and yet it may be true. In all ages and in all countries, the ignorant masses have believed in spirits. Very few of the negroes of the South have yet risen above the superstition. Among the whites, in sections where education and intelligence are at the lowest ebb, the belief in witchcraft or some other form of spiritism is general. Within my recollection, a carrier-pigeon which had missed its way and taken refuge in a farm-house, with a packet tied to its wing, was seized with the tongs by the terrified inmates and roasted alive in the fire. And this transpired in a thickly peopled rural district, not thirty miles from Philadelphia. Under the recent excitement, the belief in the supernatural has changed its phase and risen to the surface, rather than increased the number of its converts.

I have heard it said that jugglers never believe in spiritism. The practice of their arts fortifies them against deception. They know how easy it is to cheat men's senses, and they

are on their guard. Had the men and women who have surrendered their minds to modern spiritism, received a preliminary training in legerdemain, they would have been less credulous. Superstition is the offspring of credulity.

When Roger Bacon made some striking discoveries in chemistry, he was so startled that he declared nothing thereafter was too strange for his belief. There are many phenomena resulting from the mutual influence of body and mind, which produce the same impression when observed for the first time. Persons unused to rigid scientific investigation require only the first impression to secure their easy faith in all that follows. In this way great numbers of sensible, honest and conscientious people have been entangled in the mazes of spiritism.

I would not be understood as asserting that there is nothing true or worthy of inquiry in the subject under consideration. If investigated by men of science, some valuable results might be attained. But as the case now presents, the less of science in the pursuit, the more fruitful and marvelous are the developments. If there were no other fields of investigation, if every other department were thoroughly explored, if all the secrets of nature in other directions had been extorted, then there might be some reason for the labor and sacrifice expended in the wilderness of modern spiritism. But we may fairly conclude that a study which, by its own acknowledgment, evokes falsehood and truth promiscuously from the invisible world ; which invites imposition and trickery, and identifies them with its sublimest exhibitions ; which develops the sordid love of gain, and clutches at the purse whilst it pretends to open the everlasting gates, which perverts the intellect and hands it over to a disordered imagination ; which fosters credulity and superstition and revives the crudest delusions of past ages ; which does violence to the plainest laws of hygiene, and opens wide the door to mental derangement—might well be expunged from the modern curriculum and laid on the shelf, together with astrology, alchemy, necromancy and witchcraft.

But I have wandered from my original design, which had reference only to the hygienic aspect of the question. Let me conclude by quoting the opinion of a distinguished "medium" in confirmation of my own views. Mr. Home, the Scotch-American as he is sometimes called, built up a reputation as a Spiritist not surpassed by any other individual. His capabilities in this direction enabled him to stand before the kings of Europe, to bask in the sunshine of the Russian court, and to grow rich in diamonds and jewelry presented by royal hands. He has an only son who, he believes, inherits all the powers and gifts of his father. But we are told he will not allow his son to execute them. He does not wish "Sacha" to have anything to do with Spiritism, *"because the boy will be happier if he grows up in the normal condition of humanity."* These are his own words.







